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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000551

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: MINISTRY OF HUMAN RIGHTS LOSING ITS DEPUTY
MINISTER - NO LEADERSHIP IN SIGHT

REF: DAR 02/02/2006

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD, FOR
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Deputy Minister of Human Rights Aida Ossairan told PolOff February 16 that she will leave the Ministry within the next two weeks to focus on her new role as a Council of Representatives member. In that capacity, she said, she will seek to head up the Human Rights Committee. Ossairan noted that there was no replacement in sight for her. In a separate meeting, Acting Human Rights Minister Narmeen Othman told PolOff February 18 that a new deputy - temporary or permanent -- would have to be approved by the Council of Ministers. Furthermore, she added, none of the seven directors general of the Ministry would be adequate replacements given their political ties as well as other issues. Ossairan's departure without an adequate replacement would further gut the Ministry of Human Right's capacity. Post is following up with Othman to encourage her to find a plan to "fill the gap". End Summary.

DEPUTY MINISTER: LEAVING BUT WANTS TO CHAIR HR COMMITTEE

¶2. (C) On February 16, Deputy Minister for Human Rights Aida Ossairan told PolOff that she would be leaving the Ministry shortly to prepare for her new position as a Council of Representatives member, a seat she obtained under Allawi's ticket. Ossairan told PolOff that, in her capacity as a CoR member, she would be pushing to serve as the chairwoman of the human rights committee. If not designated as such, she asserted, she would not serve on the Human Rights Committee.

NO REPLACEMENT IN SIGHT - CURRENT STAFF NOT COMPETENT

¶3. (C) When asked whether there were any strong candidates who would be competent replacements for either the minister or deputy minister position Ossairan replied that there were not. She did say, however, that former Human Rights Minister Bakhtiar Amin would be an excellent candidate for the ministerial position, were he willing to take the job. During his time as minister, Ossairan said, Bakhtiar Amin was very proactive and had a strong leadership style. However, she said, he would not be willing to take the minister position again. When pressed, Ossairan did not explain further.

¶4. (C) Narmeen Othman, in a separate meeting February 18, was also hard pressed to provide a sense of who would

serve as a replacement for the deputy. She told PolOff that, of the seven directors general, she only viewed one as reasonably competent -- the DG for Research. He was a Sunni, she said, and plagued by "De-Ba'athification" allegations -- thereby blocking him from moving up. The others, she said, either have strong party ties that she believed would contaminate their work or were not especially experienced.

15. (C) Othman mentioned that even a temporary replacement deputy minister would have to be appointed by the Council of Ministers. Othman informed PolOff that this requirement was set in law and would result in a delay for naming a replacement. Othman further stated that she had heard no word on ministerial candidates for Human Rights. In a February 1 conversation with PolOff (ref), Othman indicated that she herself was unsure whether she would accept a ministerial nomination, given that her children in Sulaymaniyah were urging her to return home permanently.

COMMENT

16. (C) Comment. The lack of a full-time deputy minister will further weaken the Human Rights Ministry. The current acting minister also heads the Ministry of Environment and only spends a few days per week in her Human Rights Minister capacity. Additionally, she admits to being more proficient with environmental issues than human rights. Zuhair Chalabi, the minister-designate, has never been officially appointed. At a time when even more human rights abuses are coming to light, the Human Rights

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Ministry is falling further by the wayside. Post will continue to follow up with the Ministry as it copes with this management gap, and will encourage a rapid and permanent replacement to MoHR leadership. Post intends to raise the Ministry's right, under Article 42 of the TAL, to identify and nominate a deputy minister for the Council of Ministers to approve and send to the Presidency Council for ratification. This may accelerate filling the gap. While it is true that under either the TAL, or the Constitution, the Council of Ministers must act on appointments of deputies/undersecretaries, Post will explore whether there is any means to appoint an "acting" deputy/undersecretary pending final action.
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